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MEMORANDUM

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager
RE: Town Manager’s Report
DT: May 21, 2019

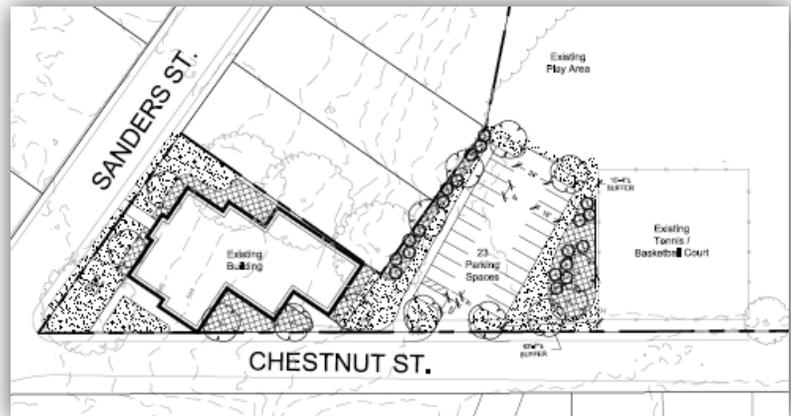
Dear Board: Please see the following update for tonight’s meeting.

FORMER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The Town is moving forward with efforts to stimulate investment and improvements at four former elementary schools situated on three sites:

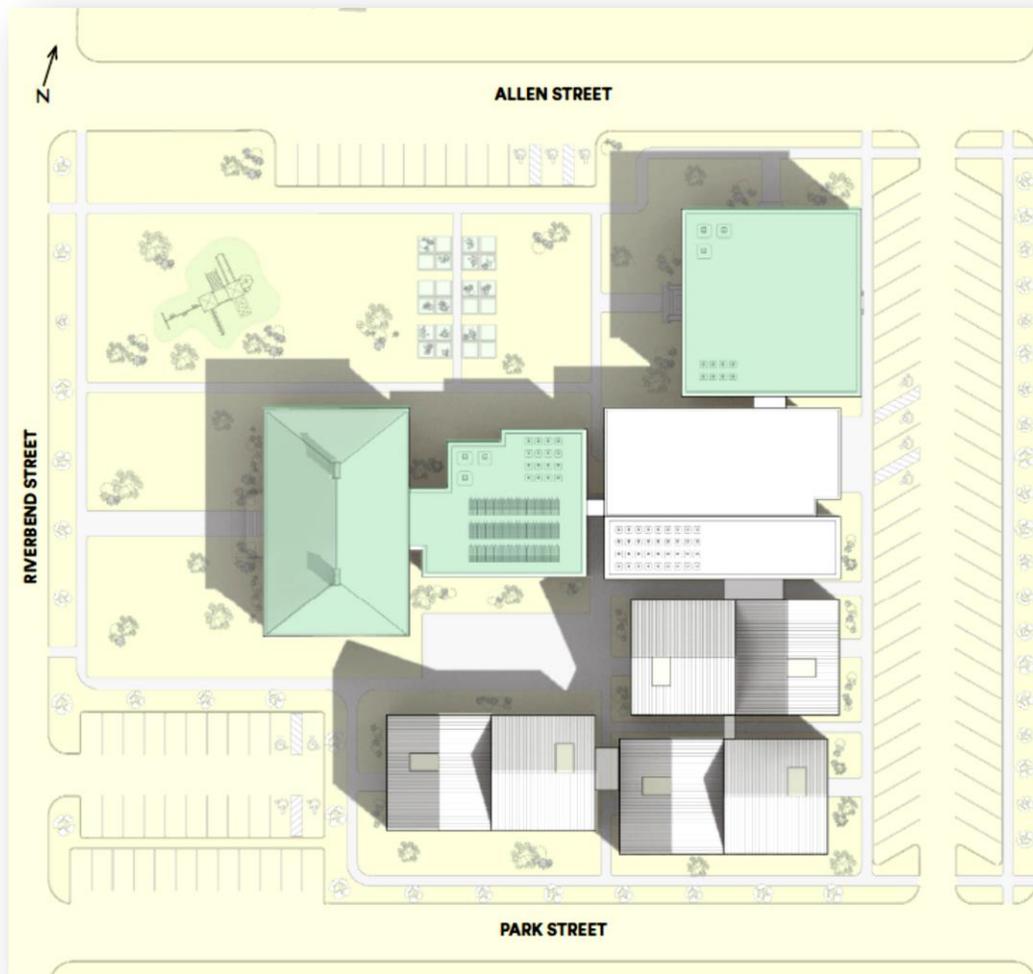
Pleasant Street School: LaunchSpace, Inc. received a \$105,000 grant from MassDevelopment – matched by \$35,000 in town funds – to make capital improvements for heating and energy efficient systems. The team is currently developing a scope and cost estimate for work to replace the heating system, install insulation and partner with NGRID to replace the lighting in the facility. John Duguay Jr. has located the blueprints for the school and my office is coordinating with LaunchSpace to ensure proper procurement given the inclusion of Town funds. We will work diligently to complete this substantial upgrade over the summer months.

Sanders Street School: Following the approval of Town Meeting to include the fields adjacent to the former school building, I requested BSC Group to render a basic conceptual drawing of how parking might be incorporated to serve the former school potentially for a housing use. With this concept the Town has tentatively included the former school as part of a planned tax title property auction to occur this summer.



Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Schools: A Request for Proposals is in final draft form and is planned to be advertised in the Central Register on or about June 26. Proposals will be due in mid-August. This site was previously advertised in the fall of 2016 without response as federal tax credit policies were in limbo at the time.

In early 2018, in partnership with NewVue Communities (interested in the site since 2016) the site was selected for an affordable housing design competition sponsored by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston and Citizens Housing and Planning Association. Graduate students from architecture, planning, business and finance developed a 50-page proposal entitled “Riverbend Row” that was presented in a public forum at the Athol Library in the spring of 2018.



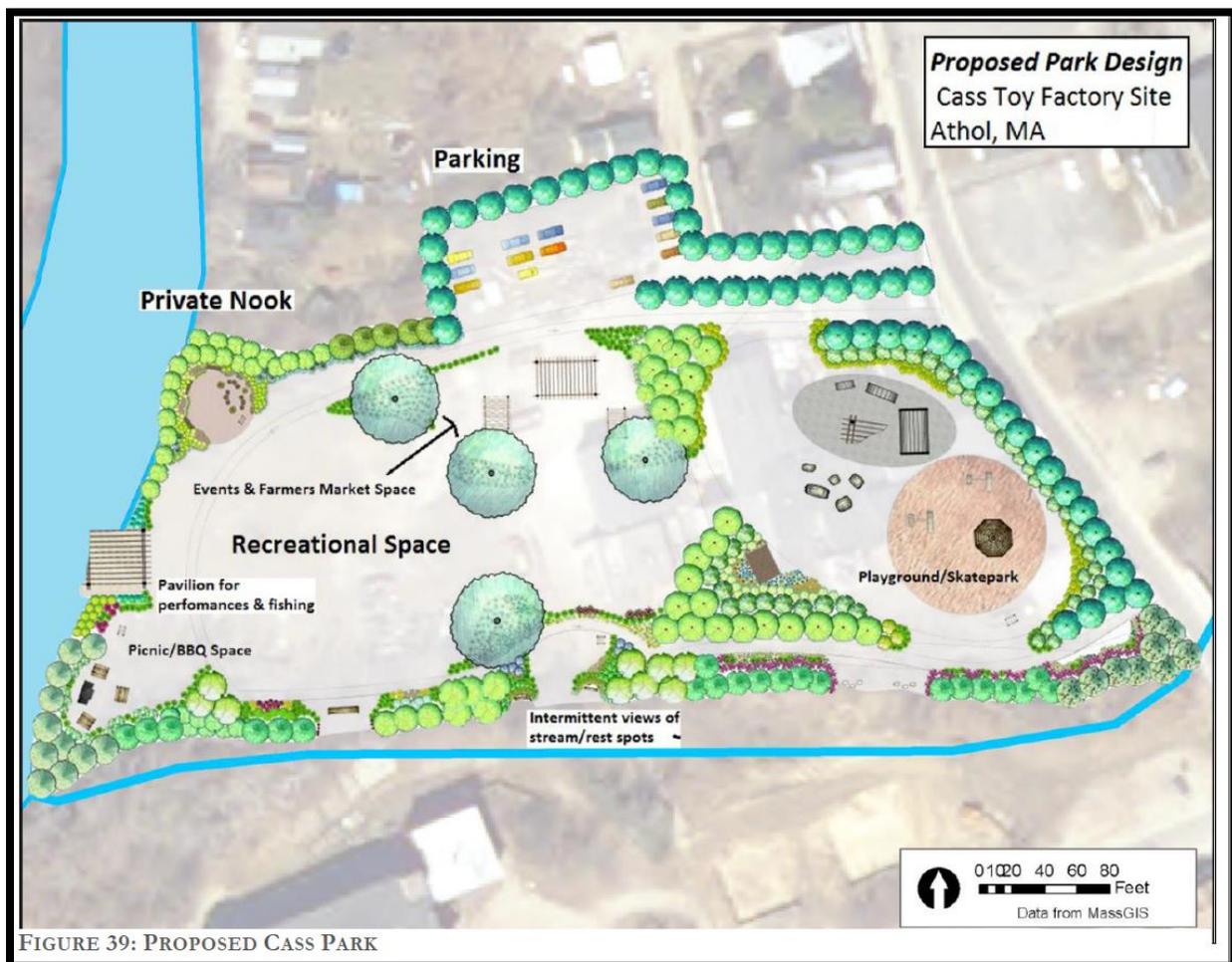
The students’ report earned second-place in the competition but, more importantly, provided a potential framework and fiscal pro forma that illustrates the economic feasibility of redeveloping the site into housing affordable to a range of income.

The full report from the students can be accessed from the Town Web site www.athol-ma.gov by clicking on Town Manager Reports and selecting May 21, 2019.

PLANNING FOR FUTURE ACTIVE/PASSIVE RECREATIONAL USE

Recently the Town has received inquiries about whether a street or deck hockey rink could be quickly built on town-owned land. As a result there was some internal discussion about potentially utilizing the fields at the Sanders Street School as a location (or squeezing it in at Pleasant Street). Concerns over the water table and space limit these options.

The discussion yielded an opportunity to review a downtown plan created with students from UMass under former community development director Andrea Buglione. This extensive project highlighted the untapped potential of the former Cass toy factory site as a multi-use recreational asset. An adjoining vacant parcel would provide direct riverfront access.



Source: Downtown Athol: A Redevelopment Plan. Millers River Consulting / UMass, Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning (2014).

The Town has since acquired the former factory site under tax title parcel and I have initiated research for EPA or other brownfield funds to remediate the site of asbestos containing materials due to a fire. I will work with the Director of Planning and Development and Open Space and Recreation committee to advance ideas including potential funding sources.

ROUTE 2 TASK FORCE / ROUTE 2A SAFETY UPDATE

The Route 2 Task Force continues to meet every three or four months to pursue collaboration from Phillipston through Erving and Gill on issues affecting safety and improvements to the state highway. The meetings facilitate communication between municipal, regional planning and MassDOT staff.

Of note, I learned that MassDOT is designing and planning installation of a traffic signal at the intersection of Route 2A and Route 32 near the high school. Apparently, traffic counts for the North Quabbin Commons development have triggered the participation of the two developers in funding the improvements. No firm schedule was announced though it is possible the work could occur this calendar year. Other points of interest include:

- MassDOT has two remaining study areas in Erving to improve from the original safety plan
- MassDOT is proceeding with a plan for installation of a safety device to prevent pedestrians from falling/jumping off of the French King Bridge
- MassDOT plans to resurface Route 2 from Phillipston through Athol in the next two years
- MRPC is 70 percent complete on its review of traffic counts and patterns and other background information for its feasibility study of a future Route 2 interchange at South Athol Road

LIABILITIES TO ASSETS PROGRAM

The Board recently received a correspondence date-stamped on May 3, 2019, indicating that the state Dept. of Housing and Community Development has approved NewVue Liabilities to Assets, Inc. for MGL c. 121A designation for the “Liabilities to Assets” pilot program to help redevelop blighted residential properties in Athol, Clinton, Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster. The goal is to rehab up to 40 properties while providing home ownership opportunities. This program was previously approved by the Board of Planning and Community Development after a public hearing and subsequently endorsed by the Board of Selectmen.

Most recently, a property on Freedom Street that has languished in the receivership program has been targeted for inclusion in the LTA program near-term in partnership with the Attorney General’s office. This will need to come before both the BPCD and BOS for a formal vote.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Met with ARRSB administrators, Town auditors and Insurance Advisory Committee
- Received briefings on Exchange Street Bridget and Pleasant Street Sidewalk project startup
- Reviewed re-pointing bids for Senior Center with COA Director and Asst. DPW Supt. and vetting apparent low bidder CD Masonry Restoration, of Oxford, in the amount of \$23,868.
- Attended ribbon-cutting for new family resource center for Valuing Our Children and made a presentation to residents at Millers Bend regarding ongoing Athol developments.
- Participated in housing and code enforcement task force meeting